

**UNITED STATES**

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization**

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**Mentor-Protégé Program  
Guidebook**



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## **Department of Veterans Affairs Program Guidebook**

### **1. Purpose**

The VA Mentor-Protégé Program (MPP) is designed to assist Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSBs) and Veteran Owned Small Businesses (VOSBs) in enhancing their capabilities to perform prime contracts and subcontracts for VA. The MPP is also designed to improve the performance of VA contractors and subcontractors by providing developmental assistance to protégé entities, fostering the establishment of long-term relationships between VA prime contractors, SDVOSB and VOSB and increasing the overall number of SDVOSBs and VOSBs that receive VA contract and subcontract awards.

### **2. Incentive To Participate**

The MPP provides non-monetary incentives for VA prime contractors to assist eligible SDVOSB and VOSB firms (as defined in Public Law 109-461) in enhancing their viability as fully capable and competitive business entities.

Cost incurred by a mentor to provide developmental assistance, as described in Veterans Affairs Acquisition Regulation (VAAR) 819.7110 to fulfill the terms of their agreement(s) with a protégé firms(s), are not reimbursable as a direct cost under a VA contract. If VA is the mentor's responsible audit agency under FAR 42.703-1, VA will consider these costs in determining indirect cost rates. If VA is not the responsible audit agency, mentors are encouraged to enter into an advance agreement with their responsible audit agency on the treatment of such cost when determining indirect cost rates.

Contracting Officers shall give mentors evaluation credit under VAAR 852.219-52, Evaluation Factor for participation in the VA Mentor-Protégé Program, consideration for contracts awarded pursuant to their Mentor-Protégé Agreements and their subcontracting plans. See VAAR 819-7105.

The Executive Director of the Office for Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) will present, annually, a nonmonetary award to the mentor providing the most effective developmental support to a protégé.

Mentors firms may be invited to brief contracting officers, program managers, office directors and other guest on the progress of their Mentor-Protégé Program Agreement.

### **3. Definitions**

**Association of Procurement Technical Assistance Centers:** The Association of Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (APTAC) is an organization comprised of and supporting Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTACs) and the professionals who work for them. APTAC's primary

function is to provide a national forum to conduct training and facilitate the exchange of information and ideas among procurement professionals, to provide a national voice for the PTACs, and otherwise work toward strengthening the program and the level of services it provides.

**Center for Small Business Utilization (CSBU):** CSBU is a division of the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization. The mission of the CSBU is to advocate for the maximum practicable participation of Small, Small Disadvantaged, Service Disabled Veteran Owned, Veteran Owned Small Business, Women Owned and HUBZone businesses in contracts awarded by the Department of Veterans Affairs and in subcontracts that are awarded by VA's prime contractors.

**Center for Veteran Enterprise (CVE):** CVE is a division of the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization. It serves to improve the business climate for veterans, to minimize access barriers and to inform the public about the benefits of working with SDVOSB and VOSB firms.

**Federal Contractor Certification:** Federal Contractor Certification is a training program for Veteran business owners intended to help these owners understand Federal contracting, respond competently to solicitations and perform successfully once they have won the contract.

**Mentor:** May be a large or small business entity, either a prime contractor or subcontractor and demonstrates the commitment and capability to assist in the development of a Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business and a Veteran Owned Small Business.

**Mentor-Protégé Agreement (MPA):** is an agreement between two parties, a mentor and protégé, to provide assistance to a protégé as part of their business development.

**Mentor-Protégé Program (MPP):** A program designed to assist Service-Disabled Veteran and Veteran owned small businesses in enhancing their capabilities to perform prime contracts and subcontracts for the VA.

**Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU):** The Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) serves as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) advocate, to assist and support the interests of small businesses. A related mission of this office is to provide outreach and liaison support to businesses (large and small) and other members of the private sector concerning acquisition related issues. In addition, the office is responsible for monitoring VA implementation and execution of the socioeconomic procurement programs.



**Protégé:** A Service-Disabled Veteran-owned and a Veteran-owned small business concern that is independently owned and operated, not dominant in its field, and meets Federal size standards of a small business in its primary North American Industrial Classification Code (NAICS).

**Technical Transfer:** The process of sharing of skills, knowledge, technologies, methods of manufacturing, samples of manufacturing and facilities between mentor and protégé and to ensure that scientific and technological developments are accessible to the protégé who can then further develop and exploit the technology into new products, processes, applications, materials or services.

**Vendor Information Pages (VIP):** The Vendor Information Pages Database is the only federally controlled database in which a legal verification process is used to determine service disabled or veteran status of a small business. All companies participating in the Veterans First program, under PL 109-461, are required to submit evidence of ownership / control and veteran status before being awarded a VA contract under the set-aside authority.

**Verification:** A process, authorized by Public Law 109-461, to examine the ownership and control records of businesses registered in VA's Vendor Information Pages (VIP) database ([www.VetBiz.gov](http://www.VetBiz.gov))

#### **4. General Policy.**

- (a) To be eligible, mentors and protégés must not be listed on the Excluded Parties List System located at <http://www.epls.gov>. Mentors will provide appropriate developmental assistance to enhance the capabilities of the protégé.
- (b) Protégé must be verified by Center for Veterans Enterprise.
- (c) VA's Mentor-Protégé Program is limited to protégés that provide goods or services that VA procures.
- (d) The Mentor-Protégé Agreement under the Program does not create a joint venture relationship. Joint Venture agreements are addressed in the Information Letter (IL) 049-6-4. See appendix 3.
- (e) VA reserves the right to limit the number of participants in the program in order to ensure its effective management of the Mentor-Protégé Program.

#### **5. Responsibilities**

VA's Mentor-Protégé Program is designed to provide Service-Disabled Veteran-owned and Veteran-owned small businesses assistance in developing and strengthening capabilities that would enable them to perform successfully as prime and sub-contractors. To that end, responsibilities for program oversight and execution have been established for the following:

- a. **VA OSDBU/Center for Small Business Utilization** is responsible for the overall administration, management and approval of the Mentor-Protégé individual Agreements and Mentor's application. The Executive Director of the Office Small Disadvantaged Business Utilization will have final approval authority.
- b. **VA Contracting Officers** are responsible for evaluating subcontracting plans and shall give evaluation credit to firms for participation in VA Mentor Protégé Program. (Ref Veterans Affairs Acquisition Regulation 819-7105)
- c. **Center for Veteran Enterprise** is responsible for verifying the status and ownership requirements of a SDVOSB and VOSB.

**6. Eligibility to Participate**

Eligible business entities approved as mentors may enter into agreements with eligible protégés. Mentors provide appropriate developmental assistance to enhance the capabilities of the protégé to perform as contractors or subcontractors. Eligible small business entities capable of providing developmental assistance may be approved as mentors. Protégés may be a subcontractor to their mentor but it is not required.

These requirements are summarized below and are available in their entirety on the VA Mentor-Protégé website at [www.va.gov/osdbu](http://www.va.gov/osdbu).

**a. Mentor.**

- (1) May be either a large or small business entity and either a prime or subcontractor
- (2) Eligible for receipt of Federal government contracts. Please refer to paragraph 4 (a)
- (3) Must be able to provide developmental assistance that will enhance the abilities of the protégé as a prime contractor and/or subcontractor
- (4) Will encourage protégé to develop business relationships with mentor's established customers.
- (5) Demonstrate to VA's OSDBU financial responsibility and capacity to provide developmental assistance to the protégé. The OSDBU may request credit reports, financial statements and other documents deemed necessary to support responsibility and capacity.

- b. **Protégé.** To be eligible to participate as a Protégé, an entity shall be classified as a Service-Disabled Veteran-owned or a Veteran-owned small business **verified** in the Veteran Information Pages of Vet Biz Registry and current registration in Central Contractor Registry (CCR). While a protégé may have other mentors at other agencies' mentor-protégé program, they are limited to only one VA Mentor at any given time. A Protégé may not participate in more than one VA MPP at a time, and is limited no more than two agreements in the VA MPP. A protégé shall self-represent to a mentor firm that it meets the eligibility requirements. Protégé firms must maintain verified status throughout the term of the Agreement. Failure to do so shall result in the cancellation of the Agreement. Protégé should have a reporting system for preparing reports of mentor's activity so that results of VA's Program can be reported separately from any other Federal agency Mentor-Protégé Programs.

**7. General Procedures for Selection of Protégé firms**

a. The Mentor is solely responsible for selecting a Protégé with whom it believes it can develop a successful relationship. Mentors are encouraged to select from a broad base of SDVOSB and VOSB firms whose core competencies support VA's mission. The Mentor may consider the following when selecting a Protégé:

- (1) A previous established association between the Mentor and Protégé is highly recommended.
- (2) Protégé's geographic proximity to the Mentor.
- (3) Protégé attitude regarding being mentored.
- (4) The ways in which the Protégé's capabilities will align with the Mentor's capabilities.
- (5) Commitment to the relationship by both parties.
- (6) Stability of the Protégé's management and financial status.
- (7) Protégé past performance.
- (8) Result of any contract/subcontract work between the Mentor and Protégé.
- (9) Subcontracting expectations.



- (10) That the Protégé has not previously participated twice in the VA MPP and is not currently receiving assistance under an active VA MPP.
- (11) Selection of protégé firms by mentor firms may not be protested, except that any protest regarding the size or eligibility status of an entity selected by a mentor shall be handled in accordance with the FAR and SBA regulations. (Ref: VAAR 819.7107)

b. A Mentor may have several mentor protégé agreements. However, a separate Mentor-Protégé Agreement (MPA) must be submitted and approved for each Mentor-Protégé relationship and VA reserves the right to limit the total number of protégés participating under each mentor firm for the Program. Mentors shall confirm the eligibility of the proposed protégé by documenting the verified status of the protégé in the VetBiz.Gov VIP database.

## **8. Application Submission and Process**

- (a) Firms interested in becoming approved mentor-protégé participants must submit a jointly written VA Mentor-Protégé Agreement to the VA OSDDBU for review and approval. Applicants will submit, via e-mail, a signed MPA in PDF format to [MPP@VA.Gov](mailto:MPP@VA.Gov). The proposed MPA will be evaluated on the extent to which the mentor plans to provide developmental assistance. Mentors shall assess the needs of protégés and incorporate the assistance they plan to provide in the MPAs. Evaluations will consider the nature and extent of technical and managerial support as well as any proposed financial assistance in the form of loans, joint venture(IAW IL 049-6-4), and traditional subcontracting support.
- (b) Participants must submit a cover letter with the Agreement. The cover letter should address the managerial and technical assistance to be provided and cost projections associated with the assistance.
- (c) The Mentor Protégé Agreement must contain:
  - (1) Names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of the mentor and protégé firms and a point of contact for both mentor and protégé who will oversee the agreement;
  - (2) A statement from the protégé firm that the firm is currently eligible as a SDVOSB or VOSB to participate in VA's Mentor-Protégé Program;



- (3) A statement from the mentor that it is in good standing and not currently suspended or debarred from government contracting.
  - (4) A description of the mentor's ability to provide developmental assistance to the protégé and the type of developmental assistance that will be provided. This should include a description of the types and dollar amounts of subcontract work, if any, that may be awarded to the protégé firm.
  - (5) Duration of the Agreement, including rights and responsibilities of both parties, with bi-annual reports. Agreements will be for duration of 36 months with an option to extend an additional 36.
  - (6) Termination procedures, including procedures for the parties' voluntary withdrawal from the Program. The Agreement shall require the mentor or protégé to notify the other firm and VA OSDBU in writing at 30 days in advance of its intent to voluntarily terminate the agreement;
  - (7) A schedule with milestones for providing assistance;
  - (8) Criteria for evaluation of the protégé developmental success;
  - (9) A plan addressing the mentor's strategy in increasing the quality of the protégé firm's technical capabilities and contracting and subcontracting opportunities;
  - (10) An estimate of the total cost of the planned mentoring assistance to be provided to the protégé;
  - (11) An agreement by both parties to comply with the reporting requirement as delineated in VAAR 819.7113;
  - (12) A plan for accomplishing unfinished work should the agreement be voluntarily cancelled;
  - (13) Other terms and agreements as appropriate;
  - (14) Signatures and dates.
- (d) The agreement defines the relationship between the mentor and the protégé firms only. The agreement does not create any privity of contract between the mentor and VA or the protégé and VA.
  - (e) Participants may use the Mentor-Protégé template Appendix A-1 as a guide.

## 9. Application Review

- (a) VA OSDBU will review the information to establish the mentor and protégé eligibility and to ensure that the information is complete. OSDBU will complete its review within 30 calendar days, to the maximum extent practicable, after receipt of the application. There is no fee to apply for the Mentor-Protégé Program.

- (b) The evaluation of all proposed agreements will be based but not limited on the following criteria:
  - (1) Merit of the developmental assistance to the Protégé
  - (2) Perceived benefit / value of the agreement to VA
  - (3) Percentage of hours associated with technical assistance
  - (4) Subcontracting Opportunities available to the Protégé by the Mentor.
- (c) After OSDBU completes its review and provides written approval, the mentor may execute the Agreement and implement the developmental assistance as provided under the Agreement. OSDBU will post the approved Mentor-Protégé relationships on the OSDBU website.
- (d) If the application is disapproved, the mentor may provide additional information for reconsideration. OSDBU will complete the review of any supplemental information no later than 30 days after receipt, to the maximum extent practicable. Upon finding deficiencies that are correctable, OSDBU will notify the mentor and protégé and request corrections to be provided within 15 calendar days after notification. Notification will be provided via faxed correspondence.

**10. Developmental Assistance.** Mentors may provide developmental and other business assistance to the protégé to include but not limited to the following:

- (a) Technical Assistance
- (b) Financial management
- (c) Organizational management
- (d) General business management and planning
- (e) Business development
- (f) Loans
- (g) Rent free use of facilities and/or equipment
- (h) Property
- (i) Temporary assignment of Mentor's personnel to a Protégé and/or temporary assignment of Protégé personnel to Mentor's facility for training.
- (j) Awards of subcontracts under VA contracts or other contracts, on a non-competitive basis.
- (k) Advance payments under such contracts. Mentors must administer advance payments in accordance with FAR Subpart 32.4 (Advance Payments for Non-Commercial items).
- (l) Technical and Technology Transfers

**11. Agreement Contents**

Mentor-Protégé Agreements must contain the following:

- a. **Cover Letter.** The cover letter should introduce the contents of the Agreement.
- b. **Mentor-Protégé Agreement.** Mentor will develop the Mentor-Protégé Agreement using the template provided as Appendix A-1 of this Guidebook. The Agreement must contain sufficient information on planned developmental assistance to allow VA to evaluate the proposed development plan.

(1) **Agreement Checklist** (for reference only). Upon receipt of agreements from Mentors, VA will evaluate the Agreement package for completion in accordance with the Agreement Checklist provided in Appendix A-2.

**12. Extensions or Modifications of Milestones Contained in an Agreement**

A Mentor desiring to extend the period of performance, realign, or add milestones to the Mentor-Protégé Agreement must submit a formal request to the OSD BU. VA may also request that the Mentor submit new milestones if the developmental assistance is behind schedule, as determined in the semiannual reports, through site visits or because of contact with the Mentor and/or Protégé. Though extensions may be requested and milestones realigned, the total agreement period cannot exceed 36 months.

- a. The Mentor's letter requesting an extension, realignment or addition of milestones must include a justification explaining the necessity for the change and must be signed by both the Mentor and the Protégé. The letter must include:
  - (1) Milestones accomplished
  - (2) Milestones not accomplished, with accompanying explanation
  - (3) Proposed new milestones
  - (4) Formal modifications / addenda to the Agreement, signed by both parties. Updates to the developmental assistance being provided, milestones, metrics, and cost proposal should be included, if applicable.
  - (5) Dollars expended to date

- b. The request must be submitted to the OSDBU for review.

### **13. Agreement Termination**

If the Mentor and Protégé decide to terminate the Agreement prior to the scheduled completion date, a formal notification must be submitted to VA OSDBU. The Procedures for termination, as outlined below and on the Agreement template, must be clearly stated in the Agreement package and agreed to by both the Mentor and Protégé.

a. **Voluntary Termination.** The Mentor must notify the Protégé in writing of its intent to voluntarily withdraw its participation in the MPP at least 30 calendar days in advance of the effective termination date. A Mentor may only terminate its Agreement(s) voluntarily if it no longer wants to be a participant in the Program.

#### **b. Termination for Cause**

- (1) The Mentor must furnish the Protégé a written and signed notice of the proposed termination, stating the specific reasons for such action, at least 30 calendar days in advance of the effective date of such proposed termination.
- (2) The Protégé will have 30 calendar days to respond to the notice of proposed termination and may rebut any issues and offer a proposed plan of remediation.
- (3) Upon prompt consideration of the Protégé response, the Mentor must either withdraw the notice of proposed termination and continue the Mentor-Protégé Agreement or issue the notice of termination to the VA OSDBU.
- (4) The decision of the Mentor regarding termination for cause will be final upon written consent by the VA OSDBU.

c. **Termination by Protégé.** The Protégé must submit a written and signed request for termination to the Mentor at least 30 calendar days in advance of the protégé's intent to terminate the agreement. The Mentor is allowed to respond within that 30 calendar day period. If they respond within that window, then 30 calendar days from the date the Mentor's response letter is the official date of termination. Otherwise, the date proposed by the Protégé to terminate the agreement will be considered the official termination date.

d. **Termination by VA.** VA may terminate the Agreement during the reporting periods if VA finds that the mentor has not complied with the provisions as set forth in the Agreement or that the assistance has not resulted in any material benefits or developmental gains to the protégé.



VA will notify the mentor and protégé of its intent to terminate the agreement. Both the mentor and protégé may refute this action. The mentor and protégé will submit in writing, within 30 calendar days of the notification, reasons to continue the agreement and a proposed remediation plan.

#### **14. Reporting and Reviews**

The Mentor-Protégé Agreement should include a statement that both the Mentor and the Protégé will comply fully with all reporting requirements of the MPP. The Agreement template in Appendix A-1 of this Guidebook includes an example of the type of statement to be included.

##### **a. Semiannual Reports**

- (1) Mentors are required to report on the progress made in each of their active Agreements semiannually throughout the term of the Agreement. The report is due 30 calendar days after the end of each six-month period, commencing at the start of the Agreement.
- (2) Protégés are also required to submit their own individually developed semiannual report, on the progress made in employment, revenues and participation in VA contracts during the prior six-month period. The Protégé's report is due at the same time as the Mentor's report.
- (3) The semiannual reports are to be submitted to the VA OSDBU. A template for the semiannual report may be accessed electronically at [www.va.gov/osdbu](http://www.va.gov/osdbu). In addition, the VA OSDBU may request additional documentation such as financial statements, tax returns, etc. of the Protégé to evaluate the progress.
- (4) The required semiannual reports will be reviewed and used to determine whether the milestones outlined in the original Mentor-Protégé Agreement package are being met. It will also be used to assess the effect of the mentoring on the Protégé.

##### **b. Internal Control**

VA OSDBU will establish internal controls to:

- (1) Review and evaluate mentor application for validity of the provided information.
- (2) Review bi-annual progress reports submitted by Mentors and Protégé.
- (3) Monitor the progress and developmental gains by the protégé.
- (4) Review and evaluate financial reports and invoices submitted by mentor. Verify that VA is not charged by mentor.
- (5) Conduct site visits as deemed necessary by VA OSDBU.
- (6) Limit the number of participants in the Mentor-Protégé Program for effective management of the Program.

**15. Other Provisions**

Non-affiliation – A Protégé firm will not be considered an affiliate of a mentor firm solely on the basis that the protégé firm is receiving developmental assistance from the mentor firm under the VA's Mentor-Protégé Program. The determination of affiliation is a function of the SBA.

**16. Frequently Asked Questions**

Below are some frequently asked questions regarding the Mentor-Protégé Program, including a list of common abbreviations used. These also summarize in part the information found within this guidebook. This portion is updated frequently on our website, at [www.va.gov/osdbu](http://www.va.gov/osdbu) under Mentor-Protégé Program Frequently Asked Questions.

***Q: How many agreements may a Mentor and a Protégé have?***

**A:** A mentor is not limited in the number of MPP agreements they have at any time and concurrently but VA reserves the right to limit the number of Agreements. The Protégé may only be in one active VA Mentor-Protégé agreement at a time. Additionally, a Protégé may not participate in the VA Mentor-Protégé Program more than twice.

***Q: Does a potential Mentor need to apply by division, or is there a corporate-wide approval?***

**A:** Mentor approval may be corporate-wide, provided that Mentor applications be filled out with information at the corporate level. Once the application is submitted with corporate information and approved, all divisions of the company are eligible to participate as a Mentor.

***Q: What is the agreement approval checklist?***

**A:** The agreement approval checklist is an internal form that is utilized by VA to determine that all required elements were included in the agreement package. A copy has been provided to participants on the webpage to be utilized only as a final validation by the Mentor before submission. The checklist does not need to be submitted with the agreement.

***Q: If I previously participated in the VA Mentor-Protégé Program prior to the update, will that affect my future participation?***

**A:** No, being a prior participant from the MP Program before it was updated does not affect any future participation. Protégés are only allowed to participate in the new VA MP Program twice; any participation prior to the update does not count toward that total.

**Q: *If I currently participate in another Federal agency Mentor-Protégé Program, Can I use that Agreement for the VA Mentor-Protégé Program?***

**A:** The Agreement submitted for approval must conform to the VA Mentor-Protégé regulations and this guidebook.

**Q: *Can a protégé joint venture with its mentor on VA contracts?***

**A:** The Mentor-Protégé Agreement does not create a joint venture. A separate joint venture agreement must be submitted to and accepted by VA's contracting officer IAW IL 049-6-4. The joint venture team must conform to the size regulations of 13 CFR 121.

**Q: *What is affiliation and how does it affect the Mentor-Protégé Agreement.***

**A:** Generally, concerns and entities are affiliated when one has the power to control the other or a third party has the power to control both. As a rule, the protégé is not considered affiliated with the mentor solely because the protégé receives assistance from the mentor under the VA Mentor-Protégé Program. Affiliation may be found for other reasons. The determination of affiliation is a function of SBA.

**Q: *Can I participate in the VA Mentor-Protégé Program if I am registered in VIP but not verified.***

**A:** A participant must be a Service-Disable Veteran owned or a Veteran owned small business and **verified** in the Vendor Information Pages.

**Q: *How are calendar days defined?***

**A:** In computing any period of time described in this Guidebook, the day from which the period begins to run is not counted and when the last day of the period is a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday, the period extends to the next day that is not a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday. Similarly, when the Federal agency where a submission is due is closed for all or part of the last day, the period extends to the next day on which the agency is open

**Q: *What do the following acronyms mean?***

CFR:	Code of Federal Regulations
CO:	Contracting Officer
COTR:	Contracting Officer Technical Representative
CVE:	Center for Veteran Enterprise
EPLS:	Excluded Parties List System
FAR:	Federal Acquisition Regulations
HBCU:	Historically Black College or University
IAW:	In Accordance With
IL:	VA's Information Letters
ISR:	Individual Subcontracting Report
MI:	Minority Institution of higher education
NAICS:	North American Industrial Classification Standard
OSDBU:	Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization

PTAC:	Procurement Technical Assistance Center
SBA:	Small Business Administration
SBDC:	Small Business Development Center
SDVOSB:	Service Disable Veteran Owned Small Business
SSR:	Summary Subcontracting Report
VA:	Department of Veterans Affairs
VACO:	Veterans Affairs Central Office
VAAR:	Veterans Affairs Acquisition Regulation
VIP:	Vendor Information Pages Database
VOSB:	Veteran Owned Small Business



## **APPENDICES**

- A-1      Mentor-Protégé Agreement Template**
- A-2      Agreement Checklist**
- A-3      Information Letter (IL) 049-06-4**

